

Night 1: Al-Faatihah to Al-Baqarah 123

Al-Faatihah: The Quran starts with Surah Fatihah, which is the supreme Du'a gifted to us by Allah^{SWT}. These are the most recited verses of the Qur'an through which we affirm our faith in Allaah SWT as the sole object of our worship and the only source our help. We ask Him to show us the Straight Path and protect us from going astray and His anger like it happened to other People of the Book. In response to the Dua, Allah^{SWT} has given us the Qur'an.

Al-Baqarah: Surah Baqarah, the longest Surah of the Qur'an, has 286 verses and 40 Rukus. It spreads over 2 ½ Juz. The title of the Surah, "Al-Baqarah," literally means "The Cow." It relates to the parable of Prophet Moosa^{AS} and his Ummah, Bani Israeel (Children of Israel) who hesitated to carry out Allah's command to sacrifice a cow as an expiation for an evil they had committed.

Central Theme: The central theme could be the mission of the Muslims: To unconditionally listen and obey Allah, to inspire others to obey Him, and to warn and safeguard against any deviation from or abandonment of the commandments of Allah^{SWT}.

"Thus We have made you an Ummah justly balanced that you will be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger a witness over you..." [Baqarah 2:173]

According to the above ayah, Muslims are witnesses to Allah^{SWT}: as being the only God, to the Qur'an as the Divine Book, to the last Messenger as the true Messenger, to the message brought by him, and to the Hereafter.

Basics of Divine Guidance (Ayaah 1-39).

The Surah begins by declaring that the Qur'an is the Book of Allaah and there is no doubt in its truthfulness. This Book is a guide to the *Muttaqoon*. The Surah then identifies people who would never benefit from the Qur'an: One, the kuffar (the non-believers) who, of their own choice, deny the Quran as being the Word of Allaah^{SWT}. They have a disease in their heart and Allaah SWT increases their disease. And two, the munafiqoon, the hypocrites who show faith on the outside but hide a dislike for Islam and Muslims in their heart. They are hypocrites by choice: "*deaf, dumb, blind -- so they shall not repent*" [2:18]. The Qur'an invites all mankind to accept the message of Rasulullaah (SAW) and challenges them to produce one chapter like the Qur'an if they have any doubt about its truthfulness. The story of the creation Adam (AS) and the nature of man is described next. Man is given knowledge and free will and he must struggle to choose between good and evil. Because he is given free will, he is liable for his sins. To overcome his sins, he is given two Divine gifts: one, the promise to accept repentance and to forgive sins whenever the sinner turns to Allah^{SWT}, just as He forgave Adam^{AS}.

Lessons from Bani Israel, a Nation in Decadence: the Broken Covenant and the Diseases of the Heart. (Ayaah 40-123)

The focus now moves to Bani Israeel, the Jews of the time. Ayaaha 40-46 describe Allah's immense blessings upon them, and their ingratitude, their violations of His Commandments, their diseases of heart -- in short a story of broken covenants. The story of Bani Israeel is described as a 'mirror' for the Muslims of all times, to hold up to themselves, to see a reflection of their own conditions and destiny. It also describes the transfer of the responsibility of discharging Allah's mission from Bani Israeel to the Muslims through RasulAllaah^{SAW}. Bani Israeel are reminded of major events in history and their behavior. Each event is described as a lesson for the Muslims to contemplate. It tells them about their disobedience of Allaah (SW) and his messenger, Musa (AS), as well as their worship of the golden calf. It was the height of ungratefulness to Allaah (SWT) since he had freed them from the tyranny of Fir'aun (Pharaoh), given them streams of water, shaded them from the scorching in the Sinai desert by clouds and given them Manna wa Salwa food. But they were not happy with that and wanted more of the worldly things. Due to their disobedience of Allaah's commands, disgrace and poverty were imposed on them: "*They were covered with humiliation and poverty; they drew on themselves the wrath of Allah^{SWT}*". This

was because they went on rejecting the signs of Allah^{SWT} and killing His messengers without just cause. This was because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits.” [2:61]

The surah then turns to the attitude of Bani Israeel toward the last Prophet^{SAW}. But, it is explained that this is nothing new, it is only a continuation of a long history of such attitudes.